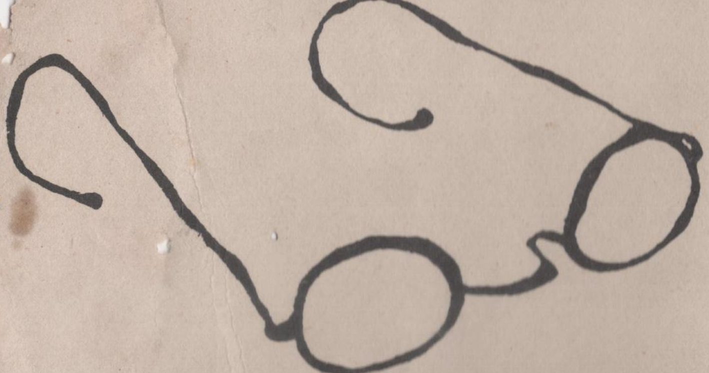
A HUT
REVOLUTION AND AFTER

॥ क्रांतिगंधा ॥



I will give you a talisman. Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test:

> Recall the face of the poorest and weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to a control over his own life and destiny?
>
> In other words, will it lead to Swaraj for the hungry and spiritually starving millions?

Then you will find doubts and your self melting away.

M. K. Gandhi

This effort is dedicated

to those
who have
financed, fought
and lost
all the Wars in the World

and

to those
whose heads lie
amidst
the rubble
under
all the Wall Streets in the World

and

to those
with whose bones
has been baked
each brick
of
all the Taj Mahals in the World

Anu & Krishna

Sithling

PREFACE

When in 1908, Gandhi wrote his famous little book 'HIND SWARAJ', he not only gave expression to India's (or the third world's) problems but also had plenty to say about the course of action for the whole world. About 40 years later in a letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, he wrote referring to 'HIND SWARAJ', "I believe that if India is to attain true freedom and through India the world as well, then sooner or later we will have to live in villages — in huts, not in palaces. A few billion people can never live happily and peaceably in cities."

Gandhiji was a holist if there was one. He thought of all the facets of life together. Human dignity, Food, Clothing, Education and Technology had all to go together, and in harmony.

If the flagship of Gandhi's war fleet was Khadi, the Mud House followed only close behind. The damage to Indian economy had already assumed dangerous proportions by free import of Rolled Steel Sections, Cast Iron columns and brackets, G.I. sheets and Portland Cement against hard earned foreign exchange and killing lakhs of jobs. Mass production of Tera-Cotta roofing tiles even within the country was becoming a terror to village level pan tile producers.

Gandhi was quite clear in his mind that the trend towards mindless industrialization would definitely bring about trade rivalries in the industrialized world on the one hand and a seething discontent in the marginalized and moronized third world. This combination would then need only trigger points readily available in many parts of the world. A holocaust would not be too far from there. His vision was reinforced by his experience of two wars that took place between "HIND SWARAJ" and the letter quoted above.

He further goes on to say in the same letter, "That truth and non-violence we can glimpse only in the simplicity of villages. That simplicity depends on the spinning wheel and on the essence contained in the spinning wheel. I am not scared that my world seems to be moving backward. The moth whirls the wildest as it approaches its doom and it is burnt away while whirling. It is possible that India fails to get out of the whirl. It is my duty to try, until my last breath to extricate India therefrom, and through India, the world at large."

He passed away in 1948 but his vision continues to find increasing support from world events and to guide most of the intense thinkers. However, the rulers everywhere have found his wisdom hard to digest; it is perhaps too good for our times.

This continued world-wide connivance against his clearly laid out principles has been accompanied by many national and international disasters viz. famines and droughts throughout the impoverished third world (Ethiopia for example), Iran—Iraq war, Three Mile Island, Chernobyl and Bhopal, to mention just a few.

We believe there is going to be a lot to give and take between Gandhi's world view and "modern science". This will steer towards a new world where the need for drug clinics and malnutrition correctives will simultaneously decrease. A world where opportunity for creative expression will become available to each member of the society and where rich and intimate human relationships will abound. In these, the whole world suffers today and the share of what is called the Developed World is no mean one. Gandhi saw and foresaw the linkages between faulty choice of technology and unemployment, mindless industrialization and nuclear wars, consumerism and intellectual cannibalism, market economy and rural marginalization. He has written elaborately on all these issues.

We can see his world-view reflected even in the little hut he lived in for about 10 years. That it was built to his specifications derived from his holistic logic for world peace, is not an over-statement. To him the questions of human freedom could not be separated from those of rural unemployment, and that if human freedom is in jeopardy, violence and war are bound to follow.

We have, in the foregoing chapters tried to bring the two view points with their many shades, face to face with each other in the form of a mythical conversation. Gandhi's world-view is being personified by the soul of his hut. She speaks to a team of national development planners about the real issues before the country over three milestones of recent Indian history.

Although the events refer to the Indian sub-continent, their overlaps with any other third-world situation are too obvious. And the so called developed world cannot escape the radio-activity of this dangerous fission.

We are quite sure that our effort needs to be much better than this to reach where it belongs. But we are sure it will receive reinforcement from many quarters. We would be far more than satisfied if a reading of this booklet stimulates hearty debate, even one to one.

ACADEMY OF YOUNG SCIENTISTS

16 AUGUST 1947

Yesterday when the Sun had been about to 'set' on the Empire, he was thinking of the presumptuous emperors and their agonies at seeing him set on their lands. The imperious amongst men bring upon themselves miseries by trying to play demi-Gods. A 15th century mystic, Kabir, had written

माटी कहे कुम्हार से
तू क्या रौंदे मोहे।
इक दिन ऐसा आयेगा
मैं रौंदूंगी तोहे ॥

(The clay, being pugged by the potter tells him that it will be the clay which will ultimately take the potter into her bosom).

"Well, that is the fate of Mankind and its small vices." The Sun was lost in thought. In the meanwhile the earth had turned around by 180 degrees and there was dawn.

There.

There in a small Indian village, stood a hut...
as modest as could be afforded by a small time
farmer. But it had housed a full scale revolution.
That it had brought about the downfall of the
empire was being contested by many. But few
disagreed that the very meaning of **revolution** had
undergone revolution at the hands of the Occupant
of that hut.

The occupant of the hut was away in the far east of India,
now being suddenly called another nation. He
was trying to heal the wounds of the greatest fratricide
mother earth had ever seen, while the two nations
were celebrating their new-found independence
amidst cesspools of blood and debris of hope.

The birds on the trees around the hut had
been announcing the dawn as usual.

Day before yesterday they did not know that they were bound nor did they become conscious yesterday that the 'empire' had ended as a bad dream.

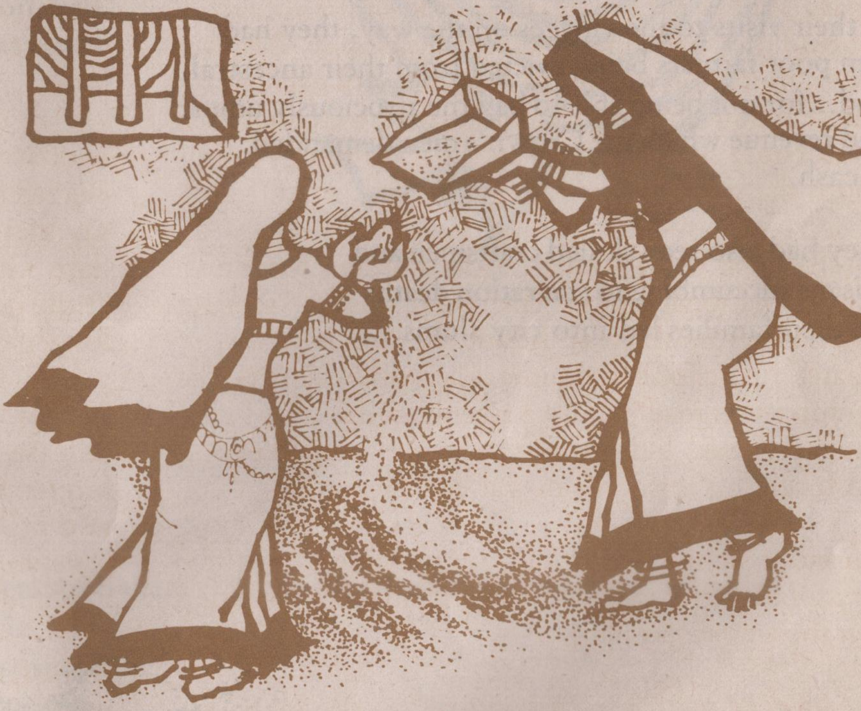
What they had clearly noticed in their daily forays, over the past 100-150 years, was that they had a rapidly declining number of trees to eat fruit from.

In their visits to the villages on the way, they had seen poor farmers being evicted from their ancestral land…for not being able to pay the atrociously unjust land revenue which the Crown's men demanded. In cash.

They had also seen skilled craftsmen and artisans succumbing to starvation deaths and their families led into city slums…..

They did not know who was to blame.

As the sky was still heavily clouded, the sun had to fight very hard to break through and those searchlight beams could now be seen in the sky. The air had been washed clean by the night's rain and whatever rays managed to reach the earth, pierced. After a few minutes of chill the clouds dispersed with breeze and the sun could be presently seen in full glory.



The doors and windows of the hut had been eager to receive the light, and here it was, the morning of freedom!

In the hut were seated some great stalwarts in their chosen walks of life. Amazed they were that the occupant of the hut had actually lived here. In self imposed poverty, for he wanted to serve the poor. What a singular lack of imagination! Exasperated by his fads of voluntary poverty, they had had to make do with a few mouthfuls of sprouted beans and a glass of milk for breakfast, instead of the colourful spread they had inherited from the empire. But they were much too mature to drop the visit even at these inconveniences. Sanguine they were that their wits could see them have all the good things from both the sides.

Seated next to a Popular Leader was an Economist of international repute. Then there was an Architect trained across the seas. Beside the Architect was seated his schoolmate, now a famous Scientist. The quintet was made up by a steeply rising trader-turned-industrialist, who had wanted people to forget his misdeeds in war contracts.

Tired of standing they had compromised the stiff crease of their starched trousers and were squatting on the straw mat floor.

Leader: Now that the foreigners are gone for good, I feel we are burdened with responsibility of a very great magnitude. When we are masters we cannot play fools. The job of running this great state rests with us and history will not excuse us for our errors or for procrastination. It is not only enough for us to act, but to act swiftly towards a modern nation state. The days of fight against the rulers are over. I hope we understand this!

Economist: Yes — that is as clear as the daylight filtering through this window.

Architect: But if per chance the ruler happens to be on an evil trail, will it not be necessary to resist him?

Industrialist: No. In a democracy the ruler is elected by a free vote of the people. Do you mean to say that people are so naive? The ruler therefore dare not be a bad ruler. The people will change him at the next hustings if they feel his policies are no longer valid.

Leader: And we have also to make sure that people unlearn the technique of *Satyagraha*. It was for the foreign ruler. If one persists in the practice of it, you will have no discipline in the country. You will have your own people using this weapon against you and there will soon be utter chaos.

Industrialist: And we have to also understand that the nation has to compete in a family of free nations. The idea of *Swadeshi* was a good strategy to unsettle the foreigners. Now there is no point in growing our own cotton if we can as easily import it from Egypt. And it is equally pointless to debate the import of cloth from Europe if we are able to pay for it in terms of tea.... perhaps a little more efficiently.

Economist: This is a premise on which the edifices of the largest economies have been built the world over. It was an astute strategy, this *khaddar* business to free ourselves, I agree. But to be sensible, no more of it. There has to be a different set of tools to take this country ahead. We are trailing by two centuries at least and we have to catch up with the Western world. Obviously you can not sit in a mud hut like this and plan out the nation's future.

At this stage the gathering heard somebody speak from the next room.

But it was in this hut that the biggest plans of national reconstruction have been evolved and implemented for the last 10 years.

Industrialist: Lo, hear that! We have to beware of such simplistic claims; they are bound to ruin us if we take them seriously. Could this type of structure really be appropriate for our houses of the future, let alone their suitability as work places for our intelligentsia?

Economist: Heavens help us from this confusion of concepts! It was a forced situation in which the nation's political headquarters were lodged here. But it is quite another thing after we have become free..... What do you say, Mr. Architect?

Architect: It does not fit anywhere, Sir! In my 25 years of life in the UK I have never seen even a borough office being plastered with *gobar* every fourth day. How could it do for our national planners and leaders who have to forge ahead and catch up with the developed world? I am sure nobody amongst us takes this nostalgia seriously. To me, the whole concept is absolutely ridiculous. This structure is not even suitable for cattle sheds of the future!

Industrialist: In fact, workers in my Calcutta jute factory would strike work if I were to offer them this kind of house. A factory worker has to live in a very neat and clean house. His wife has to look after endless chores outside the house and inside it and will never find time for doing up the house after she returns from ration shop queues. If the house maintenance eats up so much time, she will have no time to take children's lessons and our next generation will be the sufferers.

From the next room came out a young girl, about 10 years old dressed in the traditional *ghagra*. Her face was unimpressed by the galaxy of stalwarts who were puzzled at seeing her. She said:

Well, I am the soul of the hut of which you were talking. I thought I could give you the

advantage of my personal communication. I suspect that there is a clear relationship between senseless industrialization, wars and ration shop queue lengths. But let that be. More about it in due course. To start with, do you think you will be able to import so much cement and steel that you could build houses in all the 5.5 lakh villages in India?

Leader: Now, my dear little friend, do not be so mudheaded. India is a free country now and can set up any industry it wants to. So import is not a must. And you will soon see a chain of cement plants we have now in the pipeline. As for steel, our Government is entering into collaborations with several foreign countries — and not only England — to produce high quality steel on a very large scale. So it is going to be our cement and our steel.

Industrialist: May I ask you one question? I am afraid you are too young and immature to answer this....

Kuti *— Please don't mind, go ahead.*

Industrialist: You say you can be afforded by even the poorest of farmers. We may take you at face value. But could you be afforded by our nation? Look at the luxurious use of bamboo and timber over your so called "cheap" mud walls. Bamboo has tremendous potential as industrial feedstock and timber has multifarious uses in cities and possesses an export potential. Do you not think that by using these materials to such a low value output in villages, you are holding back our national industrial advance?

Kuti — Well, there are two sides to the question. One is, that if national exigencies demand, my roof can be changed to an appropriate shape and composition by application of the right technology. I am not a stickler for conservatism.

The other part is that you will be withdrawing bamboo and timber from me and handing them over to the town dwellers. At the cost of de-housing the poor villager, you will be providing timber furniture and partitions to the urbanites or people in Europe and America.

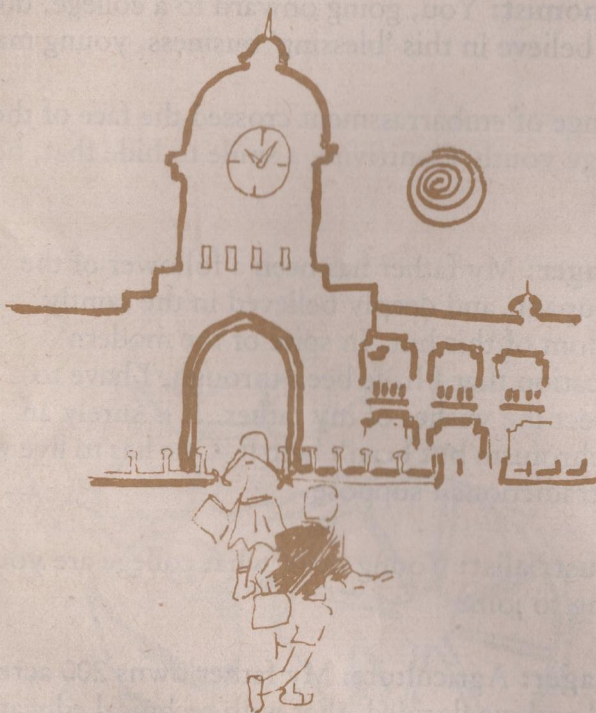
Economist: Now hold it there! This is so simple a matter. So simple to understand, that it is so difficult to explain! It is by earning foreign exchange through exports that we shall be able to buy the steel mills and cement plants. And you must have cities to locate the steel mills and cement plants. Here your timber will also find a ready market, earning good revenue for our own government, instead of just being used for your roof.

Architect: And we will provide designs and techniques to make modern and beautiful houses to serve the needs of our villagers. The poor of our country will no longer be required to live under thatch roofs. They will slowly turn to pucca roofs where you do not need to keep worrying every monsoon about leaks.

Kuti: Even accepting that you will produce these materials in quantity and quality and also transport them to our villages, would our villagers know how to build houses in your modern materials? How are you going to train them?

Economist: The villagers should concentrate on producing more food. In fact, so much food that our town and city population should get steady and sumptuous supplies. We are going to set up chemical fertiliser plants, irrigation dams and tractor factories to make the farmers' job easy.... You might add to that dairy, poultry and piggery that can enrich the urban diets and the villagers' incomes.

Scientist: We are creating new institutions of learning in the country; specialist institutions for science, technology, medicine and administration. They will turn out leaders for our future society. To help them, we shall continue to have general purpose universities. At still lower levels we shall be having Polytechnics and Industrial Training



Institutes. It will be in these that the future workmen will be trained. Such well trained tradesmen will replace the present hereditary artisan castes.

Leader: It will be in this way that we shall be demolishing the caste barriers in our country without anybody becoming any the wiser! All of them will drop their caste based jobs and come to the cities to become workers in our new industries!

Scientist: Simultaneously, there will be great road and rail transport networks to carry building components from any part of the country, or from the world, to any distant village. With great advances in building construction technology, the assembly of these components at site should be a matter of hours. The benefits of mass production added, it should turn out to be a very economical proposition to order a house.

Kuti: *But in your scheme of things, magnificent as it sounds, there is no mention of your plans of providing alternative employment to the village craftsmen who will be de-employed by your going in for mass-production at centralized production centres.*

Industrialist: But with such prosperity in every sector of life do you think it is at all going to be easy to remain without employment? Say for example, a few hundred leather workers' jobs are lost by setting up a mechanized shoe factory. Is it for better or for worse? They will have their sons and daughters put through schools to take up more comfortable jobs... like factory hands or bank clerks. What a sea-change this will bring to our caste-ridden society as our leader has explained!

Kuti: *Even accepting that you will create far more jobs than those you kill... Why do you think a factory worker's quality of life is any better than that of a village shoe maker?*

Industrialist: *(Angrily)* I object to your approach! Things that are really very simple, are unnecessarily fogged up by jazzy jargon. I will suggest a very simple test. Nine out of ten *mochi* (cobbler) girls will more readily marry a factory employee *mochi* rather than a working village based *mochi*. This shows where the preference lies. Is it not absolutely clear?

At this stage a turbaned young man dressed in the manner of local farmers entered the hut. He had a leather travel bag in his hand which he kept on the ground as he watched the gathering in the room in awe. The gathering, in turn, looked at him, momentarily relieved at the break in conversation by the entry of this rustic youth.

Industrialist: Who are you young man and what brings you here?

Villager: I come from a village about 1 Kos (3 kms) from here. I am on my way to college, in town. My father has a very great attachment to this hut and he has asked me to seek its blessings before proceeding on my new career.

Economist: You, going onward to a college, do you believe in this 'blessing' business, young man?

A tinge of embarrassment crossed the face of the village youth. Contriving a smile to hide that, he said:

Villager: My father has been a follower of the Occupant, and deeply believed in the saintly wisdom of this hut. In spite of the modern education that I have been through, I have to respect the wishes of my father. It is surely an anachronism but I can't help it. One has to live with contradictions I suppose.

Industrialist: Young man, what college are you going to join?

Villager: Agriculture. My father owns 200 acres of land and we decided, that with technical education at hand, I could help him and we could increase production.

Leader: There you are. It will be young boys like you, who are going to lay the foundation of our modern agriculture. Gone will be the days when

bullocks were used for tilling the land.

Suddenly everyone heard roaring laughter that seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere. But it did not strike them, that a universally felt hallucination is a far stronger truth than the wisdom of coloured pamphlets. The public leader wanted to return to his sentence, but the Scientist took over.

Scientist: In another couple of five year plans, as I see it, you will see an Indian farm scene full of tractors and combine harvesters and the other most modern farm machinery. Neither should you be surprised to see irrigation canals, during the same time, reach a large majority of our farms. We shall supplement these with high quality seeds. In fact, for a live demonstration of all these factors at work, our Government will set up huge farms where farmers from all parts of the country can come and get trained.

Leader: Oh yes. And then you will see that nobody has to toil on the farm. The farm labourer of the future will quietly take his breakfast with his wife and children and reach the farm by a local bus at a decent 8 O'clock. He will no longer have to scavenge the cattle sheds of his master at 6 O'clock in the morning. How I hate the sight of *gobar* spattering all over the body and clothes of our poor villager today!

Scientist: This reminds me that our cattle sheds of the future will have to be built in cement concrete with a good smooth sloping floor.

Kuti: *But I have a little doubt. The smooth floors of cattle sheds will lead to dangerous accidents to our cows and bullocks.*

Scientist (whispers to the leader): You can't discuss modern scientific achievements with the uninitiated. But let me try once again.

Aloud: For that, we have provided for a modern well equipped veterinary hospital in every little hamlet.

Then, there will be flushing systems which will flush out the *gobar* after a fixed time interval. This can then be connected to main sewers.

Villager: But, Sir! My father keeps telling me, no doubt out of ignorance of modern chemical fertilizers, that *gobar* is the best manure for our farms.

Scientist: No, son. He is really not much off the mark. Our soil in addition to chemical fertilizers, does need organic manure. But then he is not aware of the marvels of modern technology. From the Central sewage pool, the dung will be dehydrated, processed, compressed into bricks and transported by trucks from the district centre to the most distant villages. By then, the excess cattle population that is going to compete with human beings for food in the future, shall in any case have become superfluous because of the tractors. These cattle will become a cheap source of animal proteins to our starving millions! Slaughter houses will also make available to us a centralized source of animal bones, which in a pulverized dust form, will supplement the *gobar* manure.

Villager: Sir, you seem to have such brilliant answers to all the tricky questions....!

Industrialist: Nothing to be much surprised about, dear lad! If you spend five years in a London Public School followed by another five years in Buffalo University and on the way back to your country spend a couple of years in Soviet Russia.... you too would have them at your fingertips. You won't have to spend even a day under our hot sun...

He was forced to halt in his talk as he sensed, like everyone in the gathering, that the *Kuti* was smiling under her lips. But rather sadly. She spoke to the leader.

Kuti: *You remember that the occupant of this hut had thought of a very different kind of education than what your friends are suggesting to this boy? 'Nai-Talim', as it had been named, was to train them, in theory as well as in practice, of right livelihood on farm locations.*

Leader: Don't mistake this for rudeness but let us save ourselves some time and mental strain over this issue. Modern Science and Technology cannot be taught here in your campus. It requires laboratories equipped with the most delicate equipment and dustfree airconditioned environment and workshops with the most advanced pieces of machinery. On top of that they will have to be manned by teachers trained in foreign universities who will like to have decent housing and cultural, educational, health facilities for their family... commensurate with what they have been used to while abroad. Surely you understand, it cannot be provided in Nai-Talim. All that is now taught in foreign universities with course equipments and teachers, will be taught in the new institutions I had spoken of earlier. Rest assured that then, these young men will no longer be required to go abroad to get the feel of real Indian priorities.

Architect: And Sir, it will be clear that these temples of learning cannot be built in Mud. The laboratories cannot tolerate any dust and the workshops will have to be strong enough so these *Kuchha* materials have to be ruled out.

Kuti: *Do you know that there are mud houses that are 300 years old and people are still living in them? And do you know that there is not a single cement concrete house that old.*

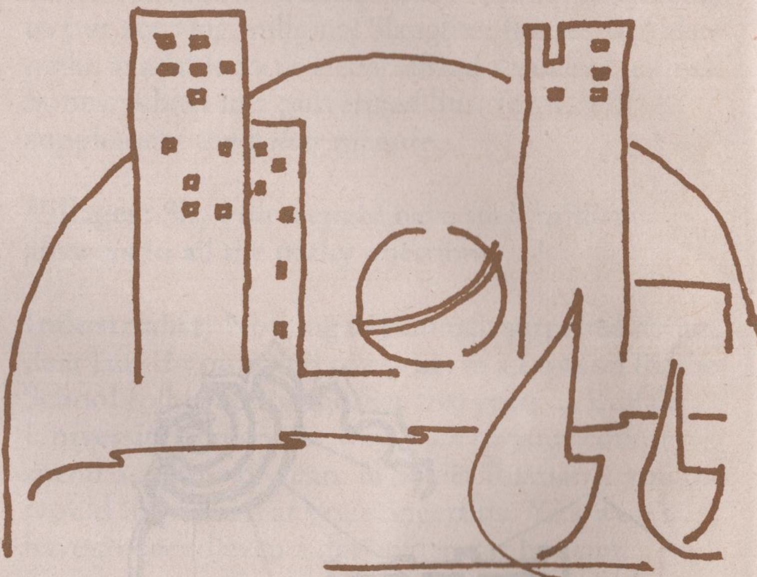
Architect: That is because cement was invented only in 1837. It has not got a chance to prove its active life beyond that. You will appreciate that in sheer strength the two materials are not comparable. In fact, as science advances we shall be having ever stronger cements.

Economist: We have to forge ahead undaunted by such ridiculous obscurantism. Science and Technology and modern economics will usher in an era of unprecedented prosperity.

Leader: Our country has to bear the burden of its past, a sad thing. It is therefore that we have to be particularly forceful in introducing scientific temper in our population. All of you should make efforts towards this because this is going to be the key to our progress.

Industrialisation, of course, will bring in prosperity to match education. Mechanisation and Mass Production will reduce the costs and make the goods available to and within the reach of our poorest. And that will release the people from a lot of drudgery.

The villagers' dull days are going to be over with tractors and other machines entering our village scenario. There will be schools, colleges and hospitals in villages to serve them. In their new-found leisure they can visit the cinema houses for entertainment which will also reach there. There could be golf courses at selected district centres to start with. We have a bright future ahead!



At this they broke to meet again at the next Independence Day anniversary

THE KUTI SOLILOQUY

He was to return to this hut after another 18 month bout of homelessness. It was during this period that our country had become free and we were all eyes to see him; the one who had shaken the empire. On that merciless day, 30 January 1948, we were making preparations to receive him the next day when instead came the news that he was no more. He died at the hands of one of his own country men, the ones he had made his aim to serve.

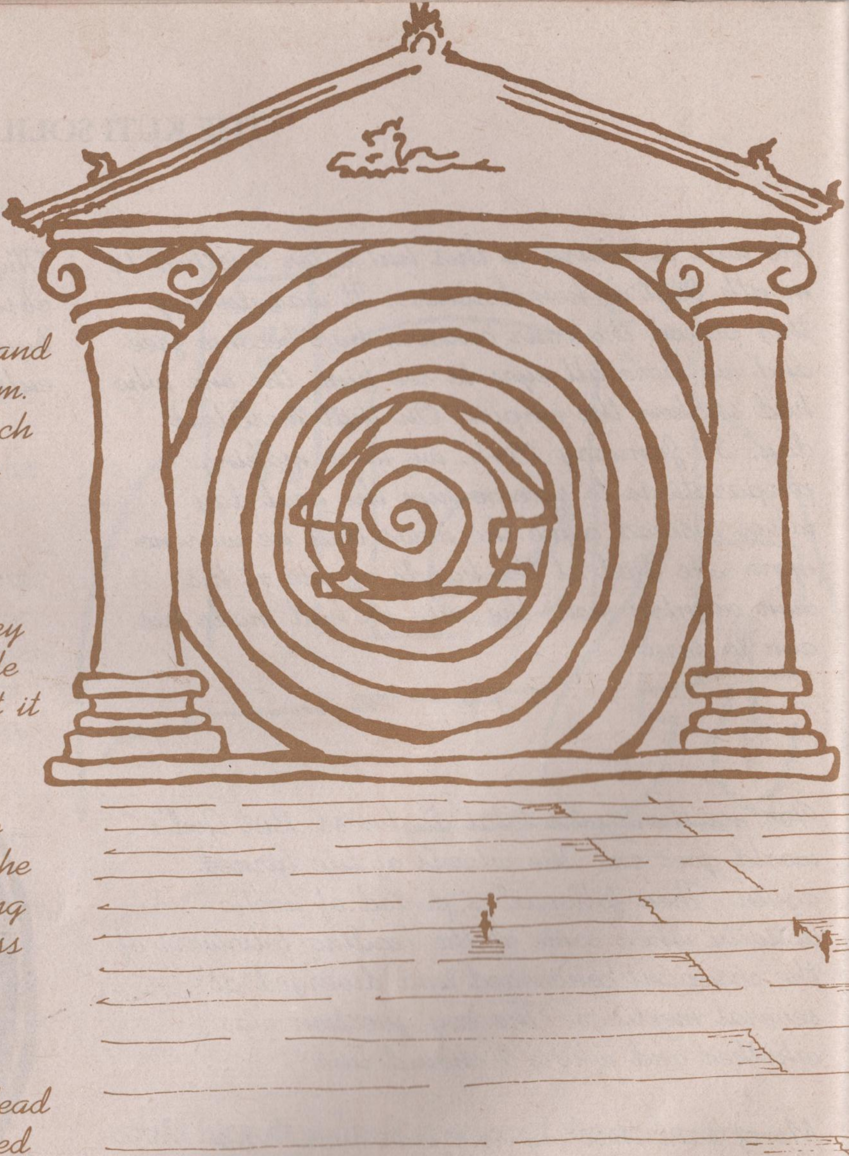
For me there was total darkness. But God's world goes on. The wheels of life turned again. Then followed a period of hectic activity when some of the leading followers of the occupant converged and diverged at several meetings. The key question was whether and where I should live.

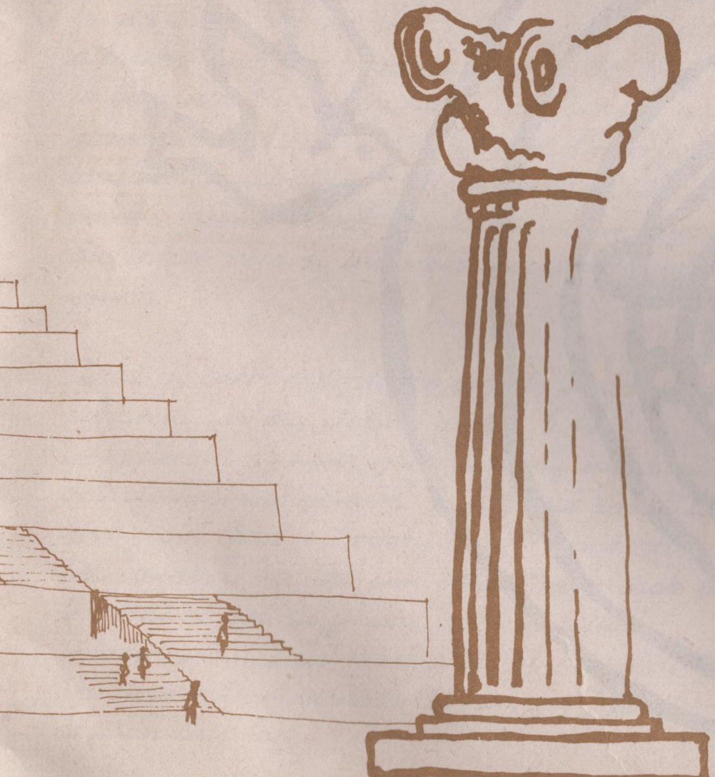
Many said that my role was over. "The foreigners have gone out of our country. Now we need new palaces and new temples and new souls and new deities." The tide of history also appeared to be in their favour.

Then they told me that I would be a great obstacle if I remained alive. They offered to build me a great pyramid if I agreed to euthanasia. But I rejected their proposal.

"But will you do away with this hut too, and the Parisar and the workers?" I asked them. They courteously replied that they had such a great respect for the Occupant that they could not entertain such thoughts even in their wildest dreams. In fact they were making great preparations to preserve his memories. For the hut and the Parisar they had thought that they would dig the whole campus out of the ground, and transplant it at the capital of the country. Then they would cover this entire area with a great lead glass shell. The Parisar workers who wanted to remain in it, were to be given the option of their replicas in Khadi cloth being placed at suitable locations under the glass shell.

I was rather surprised by the word 'lead glass'. It was then explained to me that lead glass is opaque to radioactivity. I wondered whether they were thinking of the eventuality of our country becoming a nuclear power and having some accident or other... Their far sightedness and concern impressed me!





As I was about to congratulate them on this, they said that this was for the safety of the visitors who would come from far and near. When my face displayed a blank, they whispered into my ears that they had recently received reports from an expert committee that the hut was emitting radioactive rays which were found to have the power to damage the brain cells of the young. In fact, this tendency of the hut was suspected by many of the followers in their own youth when they contracted and suffered from an inexplicable disease.

"Fortunately," they said, "in most cases the disease wears out with age. In fact, the rays start losing effectivity in direct proportion to the quantity of grey hair. Total immunity can be achieved after one grows old in the mind."

They said that they were all perfectly safe now, but they wanted to protect the future generations from these harmful radiations.

A loan was obtained from the International Bank and global tenders floated. Transplantation of the entire Parisar was found to be beyond the technology levels then attained and the proposal dropped. They had to be content with covering the Parisar with a beautiful shell in situ. However the effect of local seismicity was underestimated. Hair cracks followed and the hut kept on affecting the brain cells of the more susceptible of the young.

Tired of their repeated offers to building a pyramid for my eternal peace, I had to wriggle out of their proposals by using my extraterrestrial powers. I took the spirit form and from then on, every day I move all over the country. As the sun sets, I slip back into the hut. I am suffering from spiritual insomnia but I do need a bit of physical rest. To ensure that visitors do not cry "ghost", I rest on this loft.

DIARY OF THE LEADER

Having our country on its own legs for the last 27 years, after a break of two centuries has been an exhilarating experience. The people of our country had wanted to throw off the foreign yoke. But they wanted, much more than that, to throw off the burden of their own pagan past. We had to fight tooth and nail the tendency of certain groups of people who were trying to pass off obscurantism in the name of serving the poor. But we succeeded.

We had realised very early that if our country had to take a place of honour among the family of advanced nations, a single-minded devotion to modernisation was absolutely necessary. The development of a planned, industrial core needed great will and social commitment and we spared no efforts. I am happy at the outcome.

We have made great strides in modernisation and productivity. In fact, just the other day in our Planning Commission meeting we were exploring the possibility of doing away with the PL 480 assistance in the near future.

Inspite of all these leaps, it seems strange to me that there still exists a seething discontent amongst our people. Somehow they are unable to overcome centuries of rigid tradition and break out of their mental lethargy. Perhaps the discontent arises from this conflict in speeds.

Nature too has not been very kind in the last few years. We have had a series of floods and famines. Over and above that, the 1962 Sino-India conflict and the 1973 Arab Israel war have changed many contexts and led to the discovery of many of our own errors in defence and techno-economic equations...... But that is another issue.

Tomorrow we meet again at the hut. I remember the euphoria in which the earlier meeting at the hut had proclaimed our "Tryst with Destiny." Most of the participants of the 1947 meeting have confirmed their presence. Some younger elements have also shown great enthusiasm.

The mood this time is sombre and reflective. I hope we get some valuable indicators towards a healthier course-correction.

15 AUGUST 1974

We now take our readers to the hut to listen to some of the most fertile brains in the country dedicated to national development. The weather was rather warm. The rains had washed the air of suspended dust and the sky was clear. In these conditions even the morning sun was burning hot.

The participants felt a sense of relief as they entered the cool insides of the hut. They included some new additions like Energy Expert, Environmentalist, Physician, Labour Leader and Young Scientist.

As they entered, the Young Scientist looked in wonder at the loft. He saw that a Khadi clad village woman was sitting there. Everybody looked in that direction but the others could not see anything.

Unable to figure out anything from this, the Young Scientist addressed the woman.

Young Scientist: Sister! What is the matter. Why are you sitting here?

Kuti: *I am the soul of this hut. I am in spirit form. Because you are the only young person in this hut you can see me. Now you will understand why everybody is perplexed* *as they can hear me but they do not know where the sound comes from.*

To others also, it became clear that it was the soul of the hut that was speaking and the riddle was solved. They wanted her to join their discussions today too. They said they would like that she be seen but if that was not possible they would still like her to join the discussions.

Leader: My dear lady, wake up. Today is the anniversary of our independence. And of all places, how is it that you are sleeping here on this loft?

Kuti: *I am quite awake. In fact I have hardly been able to sleep for the last 27 years. During our last meeting you had felt my place was here and here I am.*

Leader: Come, come! I did not mean anything of the kind. Please join us.

At this they all settled down on the mat floor. The Kuti also took her seat beside them.

Economist: She seems to have misunderstood. The housekeeper was telling me that after the death of the Occupant they wanted to clear the hut of all unnecessary items. This lady, then a child, claimed that she was the soul of the hut. Now, there is no scientific proof of the existence of a soul and in any case it is not an absolutely necessary item. In fact there have been several cases where the spirit has been a positive source of trouble in implementation of our economic schemes, you are aware. So is the case with soul, I suppose.

Leader: Ok, my dear Economist. Some other time for the spirit and spiritualism... It is so pleasantly quiet here particularly after the terrible time we had in Bihar recently.

Kuti: *Is that so? I was there yesterday, in Madhubani.*

Leader: No, this was in Patna. The students and their leaders gave us hell. Fortunately their influence in villages is negligible as yet. But their nuisance value is considerable even in the limited areas where they hold sway.

Kuti: *But why does that sound so unreasonable in a democracy.?*

Leader: It is not because they have become aware of the incompetence of their rulers all of a sudden that they are revolting. The opposition leaders are exploiting these unemployed and idle youth.

Scientist: Do you mean to say that this agitation emerges out of growing unemployment?

Leader: Precisely.

Scientist: But then we had thought that with progress we would be banishing unemployment.

Leader: Mr Economist, please explain to them our discussions we had with the International Bank people.

Economist: Let us understand very clearly that unemployment for a short term is part of the process of modernisation. It has happened wherever the process of industrialisation has taken place; England, France, US etc. Whenever an economy based on modern mechanised industry starts developing, its units start producing more goods with less labour. Thus it is logical that actual employment will fall in the first phase.

Scientist: Do not scandalise us further by saying that you aimed at reducing employment.

Industrialist: You can't understand the whole by hacking at the pieces. The above is only the beginning of the process of capital accumulation. From a subsistence economy we have to transcend into one of surplus.

To produce more with less will enable us to increase social savings. These will be chanelled into banking, financial and capital sectors of the society to be invested in further manufacturing activities so crucial to again produce more from less, on a continuously ascending graph. But for this to start we have to sacrifice some things first. No loss, no gain! The society therefore has to be prepared to tighten its belts for achieving the objectives of national development.

Young Scientist: Noble advice, Sir! But you are putting it at the wrong doorstep. You seem to be asking this of people who cannot even afford belts.

Industrialist: Peace, Young man! We achieve nothing by being sensational. Go on my dear Economist.

Economist: So as I was telling you, we had foreseen this situation too and provided for these people from low productivity sectors to enter into gainful employment in high productivity areas by high skill organisation, with plenty of scholarships at ITI's, Polytechnics, Universities, IIT's and Medical colleges. But these people still go abegging.

To start with we took stock of our resources. We have plenty of land, water, forests and minerals. We were quite clear that our farm sector needed nourishment hence we launched ambitious river valley projects. These were multipurpose projects, providing much needed irrigation to our sun-baked lands and a clean and perennial source of power to our industries. They also control floods...

Environmetalist: But, sir! Half a moment. As we all know, your cost/benefit analysis was not all that perfect and in many a case they have only added to the disaster of flash floods.

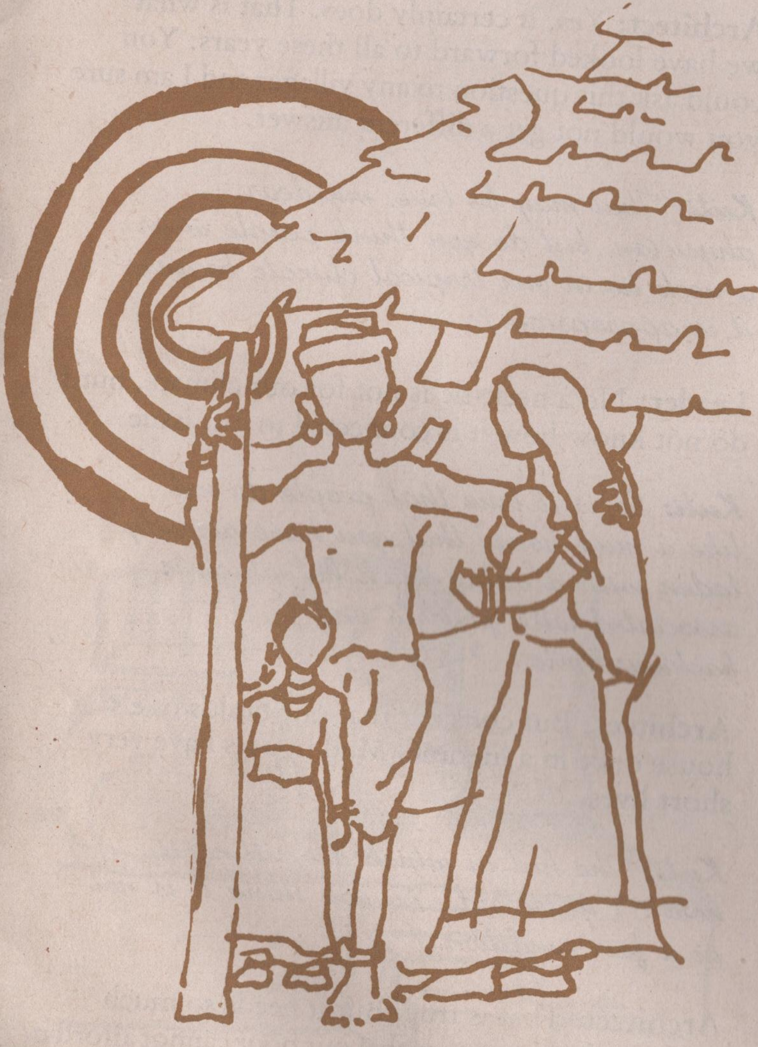
Young Scientist: And sir! What do you say to the fact that there has been such a dramatic rise in the numbers and frequency of droughts and famines and floods.

Leader: Calm down young man. Don't rush where angels fear to tread. Do not load on *us* all that. The colonial mismanagement of our environment and Nature's unpredictability have compounded to bring that about. But I assure you it is temporary and that we are going to ultimately come out with flying colours.

Economist: In our next phase we concentrated our attention on setting up our industries. We chose these for the Public Sector so that the Public Sector could be at the 'commanding heights of our economy'. Our achievements in having developed substantial capacities and indigenous expertise in crucial sectors of coal, power, steel, cement, aluminium, fertilizers, etc go unchallenged today.

Young Scientist: But then why do we find more and more people getting less and less as each day passes? Recent surveys bring out very clearly that even per capita consumption of grains in our villages has dropped in recent times.

Economist: Nobody eats steel or drinks cement.



But they are necessary tools for further development. Therefore these difficulties will be just a passing phase. Don't you find in impartial surveys that our GNP has increased?

Young Scientist: That only complicates the matter. Our surveys also corroborate that grain production is rising while grain consumption in the rural areas is falling.

Economist: The per capita increase in output means that there is more money with the people. Admittedly it has not reached the sections in dire need but they will have to make efforts and put in the necessary hard work for that.

Labour Leader: But how do they do that? The statistics which our young friend has obtained from official sources say that gainful employment per capita per year has come down from 250 to 160 days over the last 50 years.

Economist: But in several places you can hear landlords complaining that they are not getting enough workers to do their work. Farmers in Punjab are providing employment to trainloads of labourers from Bihar for this very reason.

Labour Leader: But this only means that there is deathly poverty in Bihar which forces people to leave their homes in search of employment to unknown lands, as far away as Punjab.

Economist: Actually, this movement is not so bad. This mobility of labour is a very good sign for our economic development. Faster growth will follow labour mobility and maximum exploitation of resources on a national basis. I trust everybody would agree.

Environmentalist: Even admitting that the present difficulties are of a purely temporary nature, what do you say about the long term success of your farm sector strategy consisting of the Hybrid seeds — Irrigation — Fertilizers — Pesticides package. As we all know today, fossil fuel sources have a very limited life.

Industrialist: Human ingenuity will always be our credit card. Even our known resources are not fully tapped. Nuclear energy, for example, is only in its nascent stage. Even the much publicized oil-crisis will soon be immersed under our offshore rigs. Energy efficiency measures can release as much as 100 per cent additional power even from current production. All the pessimists of the Club of Rome and their clan would not have cared if we went back to the bullock cart age but I am sure they toiled in vain.

Leader: One has to respect our people's aspirations. They have by now got just a taste of high living standards. Even in our villages you can now see people building in cement instead of the kuchcha houses.

Kuti: *Does living in cement houses indicate a higher standard of living?*

Architect: Yes, it certainly does. That is what we have looked forward to all these years. You could ask this question to any villager and I am sure you would not get a different answer.

Kuti: *That may be true, my dear physician, but do you think people wear a neck tie in our tropical climate because it is appropriate?*

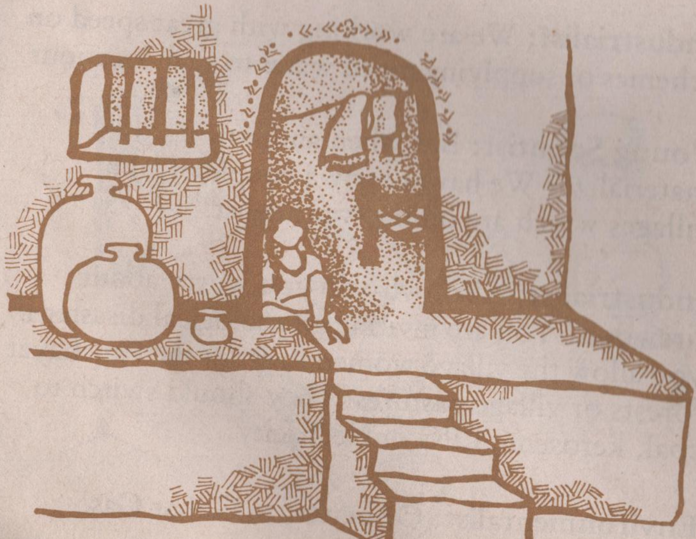
Leader: No a neck-tie is not for our climate, but I do not know how it is connected to our issue.

Kuti: *So is it true that people do not like a mud house that you have already laden with a value 'kuchcha' which is associated with poverty and backwardness.*

Architect: But consider that one builds one's house once in a lifetime. Mud houses have very short lives.

Kuti: *The hut in which are sitting is now 37 years old. Do you think it is not in a fair condition. ?*

Architect: That is true. But it needs so much periodical maintenance that our poor cannot afford it.



Kuti: *But our villagers have been doing it for thousands of years, by themselves.*

Leader: Do we expect our villagers, tied to this life pattern of mindless toil, to continue to be so bound in future too?

Young Scientist: But I would rather have the villagers get a roof to live under than remain homeless for decades in the distant hope of owning a cement house.

Leader: Why do you say that?

Young Scientist: Because of the cement situation in the country today. Cement is a black market commodity, as you know.

Economist: This is an artificial situation created by our traders who make money by hoarding and black marketing. It is once again a temporary phase. If our government just shows its fangs, the traders will return to their senses.

Young Scientist: But assuming it is so, Portland cement caters to only 15 per cent of all our house construction, urban and rural put together. If the balance 85% choose to switch over to cement what kind of government control can stop black marketing?

Kuti: *But really Shri Architect do you* *not find it far more comfortable in this hut compared to the colourful cement houses which you are used to? Look at its climate control, its acoustics, its soothing interiors.*

Architect: Honestly, on those counts, I could not agree more. It invites me to touch it, feel it, be in it.

Industrialist: Architects do have a tendency to romanticise. But we have to realise how difficult it has become to get servants now-a-days. How are the poor villagers going to keep their houses neat and tidy without servants?

Labour Leader: Our dear Industrialist does not realise that poor villagers could never afford servants.

Leader: But the village woman is already loaded with several new responsibilities. In the past she had her children to help her all the time. Now these children have to go to school. On top of that we expect her to spend time on her children's lessons. Under these conditions, how do you expect her to keep undergoing this drudgery?

Environmentalist: But our studies indicate otherwise. The woman of the house even in the few villages that have a school and in those fewer cases that her child has not dropped out of school, hardly finds any time to spend on her child. Apart from the paid work that she gets on the farms, she has to spend a large, large chunk of her time on collection of firewood and fetching drinking water.

Leader: But I am unable to understand how the problems of drinking water and firewood are connected with the housing problem.

Young Scientist: Do you not see that a house without a source of drinking water nearby will make the life of the housewife miserable? It will be her duty to fetch water from the distant pond or well. Then she might try to save on her labour by drawing from a polluted source nearby, or she may ask for help from her school-going children who would then become school drop-outs.

Industrialist: We are working with great speed on schemes of supplying piped water to such locations.

Young Scientist: But when and how do they materialize? We have nearly a couple of lakh villages which are on the waiting list.

Industrialist: Also, why do you worry about firewood? You are inviting an ecological disaster if you allow the village women to scour the Panchayat forests or village pastures. They should switch to coal, kerosene, LPG or electricity.

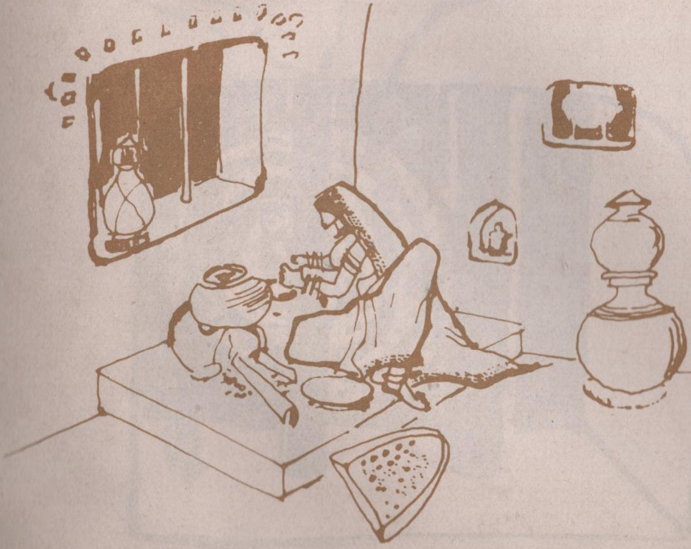
Environmentalist: Or better, to Gobar Gas.

Kuti: *The poorer sections of rural society cannot afford the initial cost of gobar gas, nor can many of them own cattle to ensure a steady feedstock. As for the others, your distribution machinery on electricity and LPG is not in a position to deliver the goods at least for a few more decades.*

Environmentalist: By the time you may be able to set up an appropriate distribution network these fossil fuel resources will have been exhausted.

Architect: But coming back to hard core housing, mud presents many problems, quite genuine ones a that. You can hardly use modern furniture on mud floors as one has seen so often. What would happen to the kuchcha floors? Sorry mud floors!

Kuti: *May I ask a couple of questions? Is furniture really so necessary an item for our progress and my dear Physician, do you think it serves any orthopaedic purpose?*



Economist: I am unable to understand whether you are asking these questions out of sheer sarcasm or you are again trying to call in the support of jargonic pressure.

Young Scientist: Neither is the case. Let us try to answer her queries. Clearly furniture is not an essential tool for domestic comfort.

Leader: As for the health factor, furniture does not induce the right posture for better health. The indigenous squatting system is the best, at least for our tropical conditions. In fact, some recent studies indicate that the squatting posture helps better circulation of blood.

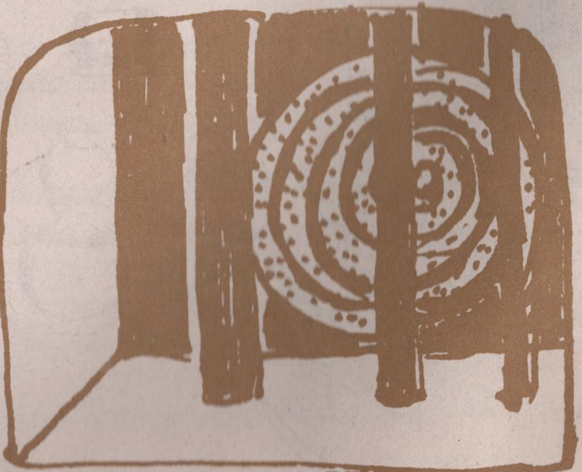
Industrialist: I suppose we have to wait for more scientific studies for conclusive proof.

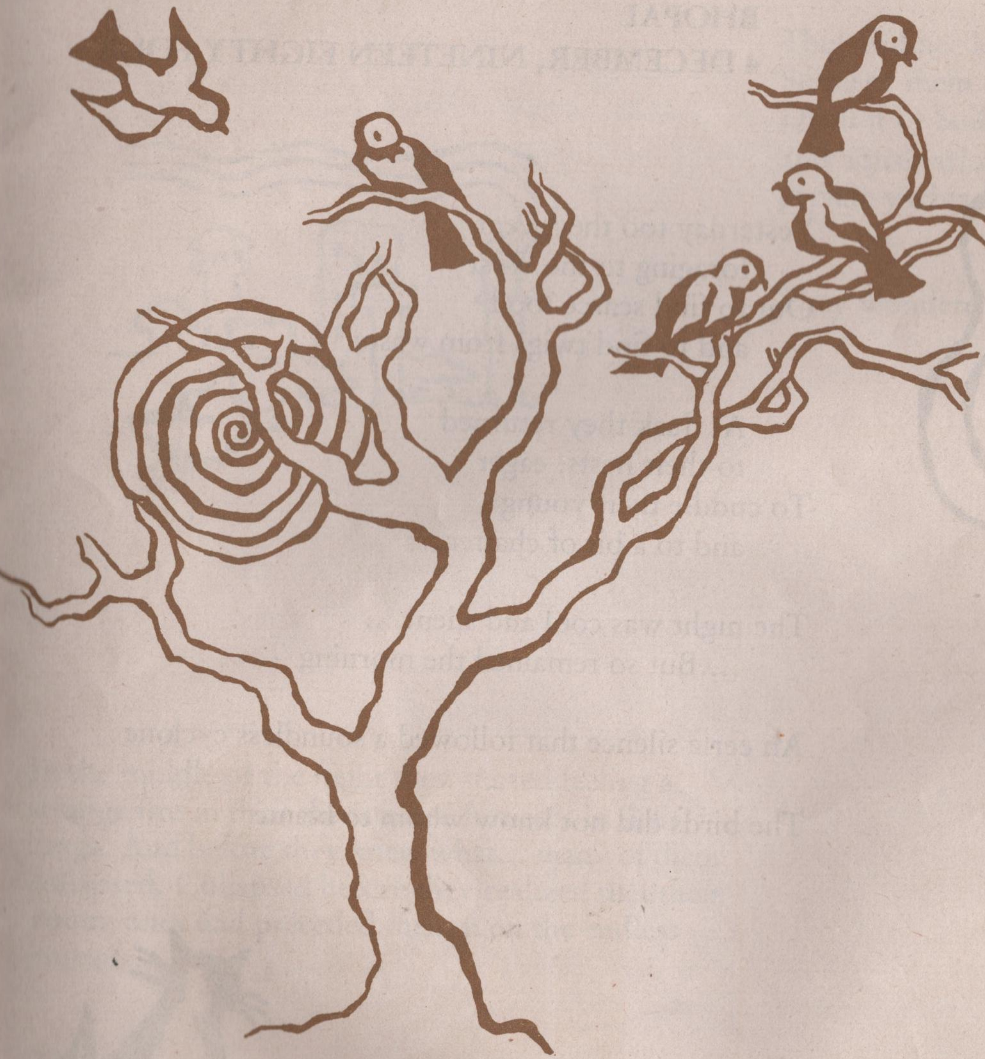
Kuti: *But even accepting that furniture use is not conclusively harmful to our health, can you imagine the tremendous demands it will make upon our forest resources even if we intend to supply minimal furniture to our 12 crore rural families.*

Environmentalist: It will roughly work out to three crore fully grown trees.

Industrialist: Now this is what I call static thinking. Furniture does not necessarily mean wooden furniture. There are many alternative materials like steel, plastics etc. This strategy will also give a tremendous boost to our industrialization.

Leader: Well, things look very confused now and I do not know whether we have really covered any ground today or have just been moving in circles. For the moment I am afraid we will have to stop here because I have just received a message that I must immediately reach Delhi by my special plane.





On this tree is a bird:
it dances in the joy of life

None knows where it is:
and who knows
what the burden
of its song may be?

Where the branches throw
a deep shape,
there does it have its nest:
and

It comes in the evening
and flies away
in the morning,

And says not a word
of that which it means

— Kabir
(Translated by Rabindranath Tagore)

BHOPAL
4 DECEMBER, NINETEEN EIGHTY FOUR

Yesterday too they went
foraging to the West
Out to find scarce food
and to find twigs from waste

At dusk they returned
to their nests, eager
To cuddle their young
and to a bit of chatter

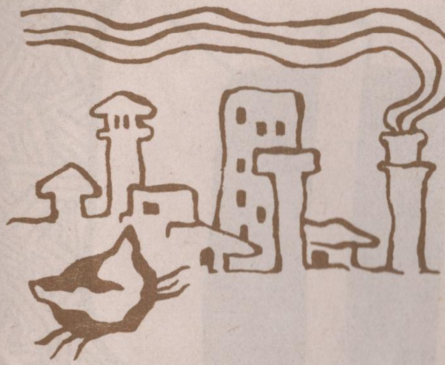
The night was cool and silent....
....But so remained the morning

An eerie silence that followed a soundless cyclone

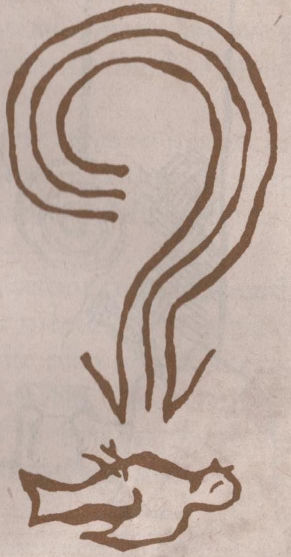
The birds did not know whom to blame

They did not know who was to blame.
Some of them whispered that a great cat had dreamt.
Dreamt of building marble places, with emerald lawns and aquamarine pools, with golf courses aboard private yachts and security guards in attendance.

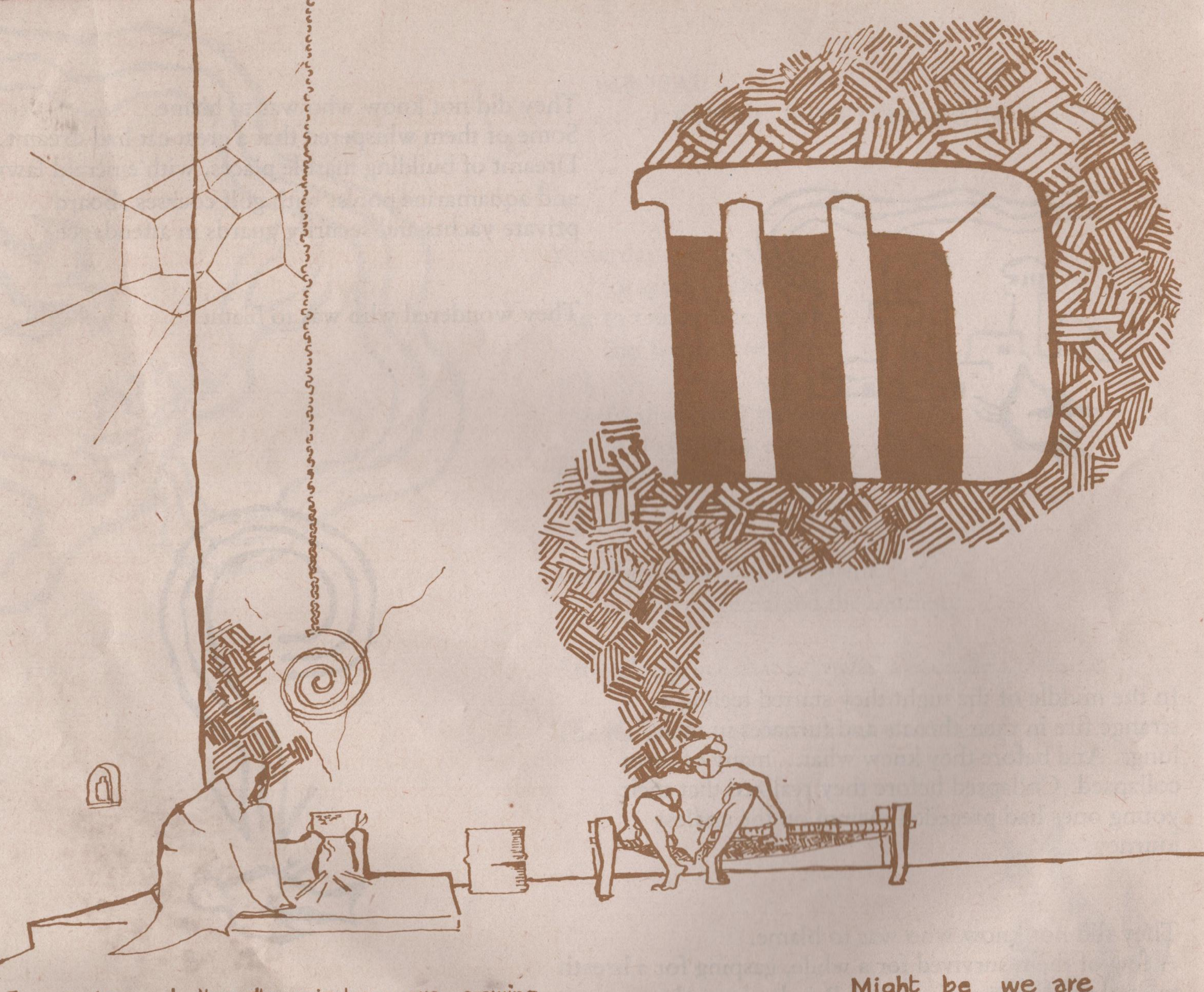
They wondered who was to blame.



In the middle of the night they started feeling a strange fire in their throats and furnaces in their lungs. And before they knew what... many of them collapsed. Collapsed before they realized that their young ones had preceded themm on the endless journey.



They did not know who was to blame.
A few of them survived for a while, gasping for a breath to cool the fire in their wings. But the more they breathed, the more they burnt.



I wonder whether the windows are growing
TALLER every day

Might be we are
becoming smaller

15 AUGUST 1987
Hotel Milton, Delhi

Leader: Dear Friends, we are meeting after a break of 12 years. We had decided to meet each year after the last meeting but for some reason or other we had to keep postponing the meeting. Times have been very unpredictable and something or the other kept me at the last moment and the meeting had to be cancelled.

Today on this 40th Anniversary of our freedom we have at last been able to make it. Things have now started becoming normal after we have ironed out most of the political issues. And we should now have the right frame of mind to look at real issues.

We have some new faces to join us in our discussions while some of the participants of earlier meetings have conveyed their regrets.

I would like to use our time efficiently today, unlike the earlier meeting where we could not evolve any definite plan of action even after heated and prolonged debates. We have in this conference hall the cream of the country's intelligentsia and if we will, I am sure we can make it.

Just as this year happens to be our 40th year of independence and great celebrations as well as programmes are underway, so also has the U.N. declared this as the International Year of Shelter for the Homeless and our Government has fully supported the effort. I would like to start the meeting by taking up the issue of housing first.

I would request our Economist friend to start the proceedings.

Economist: As all of you are aware, our country faces a shortfall of 24.8 million dwelling units, about 75% of them in rural areas and the rest.....

Young Scientist: Excuse me for interrupting you, but don't you think that much of housing shortage in rural areas can be ascribed to our choosing this conference room for our meeting today?

Economist: I believe our Leader had wanted this meeting to be very precise. I would like Young Scientist to explain the relevance of his interjection.

Young Scientist: What I mean is that......

Leader: Mr. Young Scientist, let that be for the time being. We shall come back to it later. Please carry on, Mr. Economist.

Economist: And about 25% of the shortfall is in the urban areas. As in every other case the biggest impediments have been caused by our biggest achïevement.

Management Consultant: You are talking in parables, please explain sir!

Economist: No. I mean it is the rise in our population. It was because of our advanced health services that our death rate has drastically come down while the birth rate has remained more or less static.

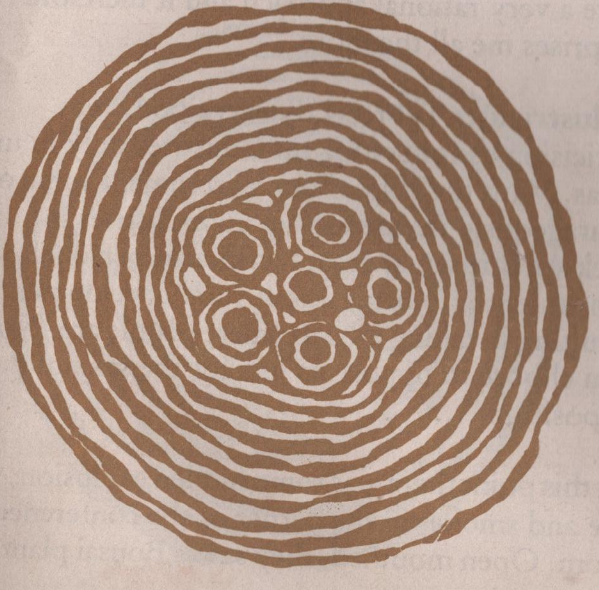
Young Scientist: But then we should have foreseen the rise in population and provided for that.

Economist: We have spared no efforts on the population front, as everybody is aware.

Management Consultant: That is quite true but what surprises me is that while the housing shortfall in the villages is around 18 million you have provided for only 2.71 million houses to be constructed in the rural areas in the entire VII Plan period. This will not even meet 15% of the present shortfall. Then the expected rise in our rural population during the plan period is about 32 million which will effect a new demand of. Six million. They will simply ensure a larger housing shortfall figure in the next Plan.

Leader: But you have to realize that ours is a poor country and we can hardly afford that order of expenditure without any tangible returns.....

Economist: And in subsidy!



Merchant Banker: But our rural housing outlay appears to be only Rs. 577 crores, which is not such a large sum, to put it mildly. The expenditure towards housing 80% of our people is hardly 0.32% of our Public sector Plan outlay. This money is not enough to finance even one third of the cost of one super thermal power plant, of which there are many in the country. And the share of the housing component of our plan funds has been on a steep decline.

Management Consultant: Even more glaring is that this entire outlay for a five year period is much less than the six-month sales of one of our industrial groups, someone may correct me if I am mistaken.

Economist: But even if one were to allocate more to this sector, it would only lead to shortages of critical building materials with this sudden increase in demand. A cement factory cannot be built overnight. Moreover it will require further power and coal which capacities, everybody knows, are severely inelastic. As a result, our cement and steel prices will go up and so will those of bricks and timber. The good intentions will eventually result in our delivering less houses. Besides, this will only mean further general increase in prices which may lead us, I do not know where.

Merchant Banker: But then, what do the 85% of our homeless villagers do?

Economist: It would look like a dead-end case. But when we say they are 'homeless' it really means that they, most of them at any rate, have some form of sub-standard housing. These people need to be motivated to save from their earnings, and put aside enough to look after necessary repairs and extensions.

Young Scientist: How could one expect to be able to put aside any money out of a total weekly house-hold income of Rs. 75-100. This would not be enough for buying even the bare necessities for them. Do you want them to cut on their food intake? And to stop their wards from attending school?

Bureaucrat: Policy planning is a very scientific activity and as one thinker has said, "When Emotion enters through the door, Reason goes out of the window." We will have to save ourselves from such pot-boiler sentimentalism. I have myself visited many villages in many parts of the country. I have seen toddy "*Thekas*" doing roaring business in the poorest localities on every pay day! When somebody affords a bellyful of drinks, he certainly can save for his house if he so wishes.

Young Scientist: There again this poor household suffers because we as a society are not able to guard their real interests. But let that be aside for a while or we will loose our thread. Let us return to the Savings issue; what about the nondrinking population — a far larger percentage, fortunately?

Industrialist: Leave apart the poverty of the past. Now that the villager is coming into the mainstream economy he has many new avenues of earning money, say by taking employment in the factories recently set up in backward districts or by keeping cattle and selling the milk to co-operative dairies....

Young Scientist: I am afraid, sir, that these new avenues have only further eroded the quality of life of the villagers.

Industrialist: You shock me, my young Friend!

Economist: If you had decided to blindly criticise us for anything that we do, you could not have done better. I am sure you are not that type, but have a very rational approach and it therefore surprises me all the more.

Industrialist: Till recently every body was criticising us for setting up industries only in urban areas. With the help of our government some of us courageously decided to set up industries in backward areas; at great sacrifice to personal convenience, to bring about rural development resulting in taking jobs to where people are. Now if you choose to oppose us just for the sake of opposition.....

At this point there was some sudden explosion, with fire and smoke, in the corner of the conference room. Open mouthed, they saw a Bonsai plant

materialising into human form. Everybody went under the table, on the guard. As this appeared to be a completely new idea in the extremist armour, they did not know what to do. But the hazy form further changed into a beautiful Indian woman whom the leader quickly recognised as the Kuti.

Leader: Welcome back to the mortal world! Welcome!! Welcome!!! Give a special hand to our old young friend. Come, please, sit here.

Kuti: *I must explain my rather uncommon 'barging in'. I have been in my mortal form since you started the special programmes on the 40th year of Independence. I have been moving in several parts of the country amongst the people. I heard of today's meeting and wanted to join you here. So I set upon a Pad-yatra about three months back and finally today, I was able to reach the 'Reception' at the exact hour.*

But they turned me out. They said it was a very high-powered meeting and anybody without a tinge of mud in his/her head and a bow on his collar had no hope of making it. I showed them a lot of mud on my clothes and body but they insisted on checking my skull with special instruments. When they caught hold of me, I had no option but to use my extra terrestrial powers to reach here.

Leader: We apologize if those people insisted on that. Because of the recent increase in violence we have had to be very vigilant.

Kuti: *OK! Never mind and sorry for the inconvenience to all of you.*

Leader: Please don't worry. We will catch the thread once again. So as our friend, Industrialist was telling us about taking the jobs to where peope are...

Kuti: *I think it needs a bit of explanation. Whether one should set up an industry to be located in Calcutta or in the Bastar hinterland is like asking that famous question: 'Did you beat your wife at 4 O'clock or at 6 O'clock?'*

Merchant Banker: I guess you would have to do a lot of explanation.

Young Scientist: Mindless industrialisation is bad anywhere, I have seen a recently set up refrigerator assembly unit in Chandrapur, a tribal district. Almost all components come from outside; 90% of the employees are non-locals coming from urban areas and the produce of this factory, namely refrigerators has few buyers here. The only residual effect of this industry is some lumpen cigarette and *Pan* and tea stalls.

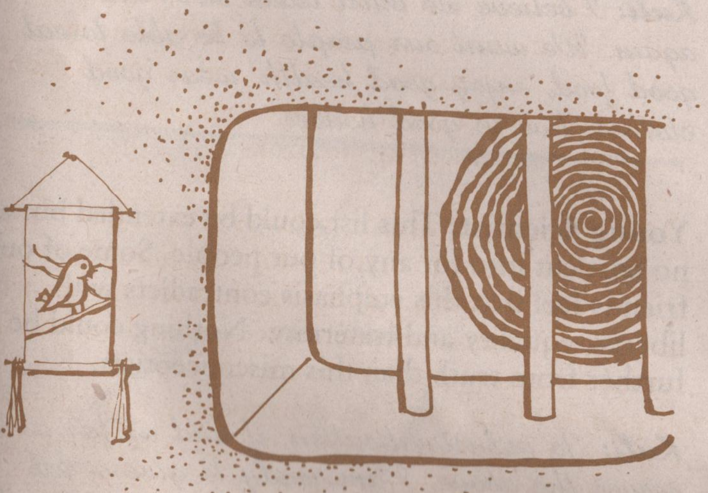
Industrialist: This, if it is true, may be one of those rare examples which distort our view. Exceptions can be taken up separately.

Young Scientist: No it is not rare. Only that they need a surgeon's knife to bring out their incongruency in other areas. Take for example a cement plant about to be set up at a cost of Rs. 100 crores in M.P. At that huge cost it will employ only about 1,100 people at about Rs. 9.0 lakh of capital investment per person employed. Most of even these will have to be drafted from the urban areas because the skills required by such industries are not available in the villages. Then the farmers who have to be evicted from their ancestral lands are enticed with one employment per family and compensation in terms of money for land. The employment reduces a farmer to a peon or an orderly if he or his son chooses to become one while the compensation money is quickly spent in some long pending marriage or drained out in drinks.

Then the produce of this industry would be ploughed back to the cities while the hinterland is left to take the brunt of cement dust setting fire to the quality of enviornment. The cement dust which settles on grass finally finds its way into the intestines of the cattle, as is happening in Kodinar, Gujarat. I could go on citing many more instances, the examples in Bihar too glaring to need any repetition.

Management Consultant: Well there seems to be much stuff in your argument. Something I had not looked at so far! Incidentally it was our firm which prepared that fancy project report for the cement plant which you are talking about. It had hardly occurred to me at that time that for a fat consultation fee, it was my banker friend and me who were digging graves for the farmers and their cattle.

But to be honest, I do not understand why you are opposed to the farmers selling milk to dairy co-operatives to add to their incomes. I thought there could not be any better proposition for our poor farmers.



Young Scientist: Things certainly are not very simple. As it is, nutrition levels in our villages are in the range of sub-optimal to sub-human. If in such a case, one were to offer cash for the best nutrient they had with them, the milk available to the village itself naturally dries. Earlier when this milk did not have urban buyers, the poorest in the village had access to that milk — at least to the butter-milk. In those times, villagers only sold butter or ghee to the towns. The butter milk, as a by-product, remained in the village and being in plenty, was given free for the asking. Butter milk is an excellent protein food. Once this system collapsed, our Leader had to rush in protein supplements in capsules at far greater costs, which are then reflected as subsidies to rural areas.

Our objective should be more nutrition and better health. More money usually buys less for the poorer sections. Now I suppose it is clear to you why I was talking of erosion in the quality of life.

Leader: No, certainly not. On the contrary your thoughts are only adding to the confusion of the meeting.

Kuti: *No, not really, if you exert just a little more. What is it that our people want? Good food, Good clothes, Good health, Good houses or more fertilizers, more rail lengths, more drugs, more cement?*

Economist: I suspect that this discussion is climbing down. Are we at all considering that the two sets do not overlap and overlap, I say, very completely. We may be wrong in the implementation part, I may concede that.

Young Scientist: No! They do not necessarily overlap and in certain cases, I am sure they clearly contradict.

Industrialist: How do you say that?

Young Scientist: There are many examples; the trail blazing Bhopal disaster and...

Economist: We should, at a national policy discussion, talk of the rule and not the exception, if I may repeat what the Leader said.

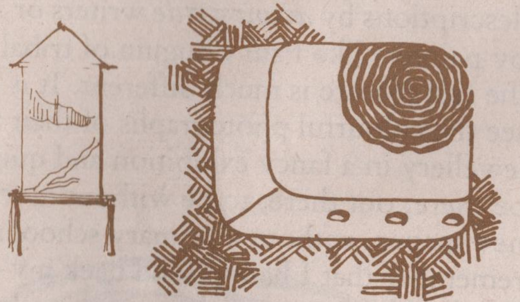
Kuti: *I do think he is talking of the rule only, that in Bhopal the mischief was caught while there are so many potential Bhopals. And it is not simply the leakage of gas but the very process of impoverishment which is an integral part of our thoughtless industrialisation that I am putting to question.*

Industrialist: Do you really think we could do without industrialisation?

Kuti: *I believe we must learn our ABC again. We want our people to be able to eat good food, enjoy good health, wear good clothes, live in good houses.*

Young Scientist: This list could be extended but at no cost cut into for any of our people. Some of our friends feel that this emphasis contradicts with liberty, equality and fraternity. Nothing could be further from truth than this misconception.

Kuti: *To industrialisation, if and as far as it serves the above, I am ready to give a red carpet welcome. Industry does not necessarily mean only a million TPA Cement plant. It*



could as well be a 0.5. TPD lime kiln. It could be a loin loom, an oil seed crusher in a village or a bullock cart-making workshop. For achieving these objectives, we shall have to reach our planning and decision-making machinery right up to where the Man is. I am deliberately avoiding the words "down to the Man" because it is our 'brat'ish outlook which has created the megastructure on the top of which we find ourselves sitting. But it is a muck heap, we must realise. The earlier we reach him, the lesser will we need mental asylums and blood pressure clinics.

Economist: But Madam! We are very much trying to help the poor people. Did you not recently hear that we are planning to go ahead with the grand Narmada Valley Development Project for doing the same.

Young Scientist: I believe one could never be farther away from reality. These huge schemes necessitate huge population transfers from tribal areas. Few events could match the pitch of a tragedy as this. They leave a lasting vacuum in the lives of a couple of generations at the very least, desolate impoverishment apart. Even the schools, houses and hospitals that we promise them never reach them. Then the tremendous damage to our ecological fibre, something no human efforts can give back and all this for an uncertain dam life with high soil erosion rates in the catchment area.

Kuti: *For achieving the objective of parching the thirst of the soil, we should be working towards much more innovative and decentralized schemes reaching the people's needs.*

I have heard of a district level plan where a team of scientists had worked upon an alternative to large scale dam projects and submitted a proposal for a much wider benefit strategy. At 25% of cost and 5 times more employment potential! More over, this alternative was catering to added avenues of income through forests and water bodies where there are barren wastes now. But our system never took a serious congnizance of the proposal and it is gathering dust, as usual.

Leader: You talk of population transfers from tribal areas. But we all thought that this is the best way of bringing these societies into the twentieth century. They will get modern houses, hospitals, schools and jobs. Right now some of them do not even wear clothes.

Young Scientist: That, I think, presupposes that wearing clothes is a necessary ingredient to being considered equal....

Public Leader: No, no! Nobody is questioning their equality, we are all born equal.

Young Scientist: Not only that we are equal but that they possess many things that we do not seem to be at all nearing by our development efforts.

Bureaucrat: Well, we too have read of the idyllic descriptions by *avant garde* writers or seen pictures by painters like Paul Gauguin of tribal societies but the real picture is much different. It is one thing to see the colourful photographs of their festivals or jewellery in a fancy exhibition and quite another to be there, out there, to be without morning tea and newspaper, without a primary school and clinic. I remember that I had to send back my jeep one hundred kilometers to buy tooth paste during one of my trips to Bastar.

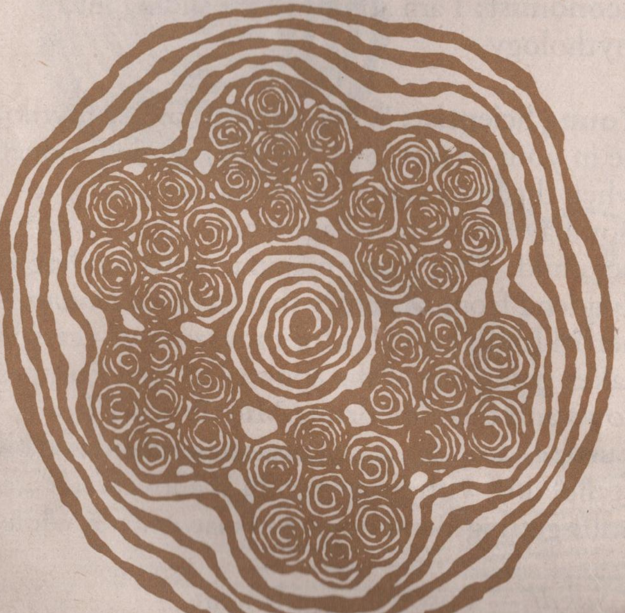
Young Scientist: I think you are yourself making the issue clear. Our priorities arise out of our own private world view and we try to impose that on the weaker world. Tooth-paste, morning tea, newspapers and even Primary School and Clinics are not *their* priorities.

Bureaucrat: You certainly do not want them to keep hunting the deer and the fowl for their food, I suppose?

Young Scientist: Frankly, I do not see much wrong with their eating these delicacies, but that is not the point. I will relate an anecdote with the chair's permission.

Leader: Ok, go ahead.

Young Scientist: A group of us Young Scientists had gone to the North Eastern parts for a scientific study. During this we were travelling from Guwahati to Shillong by car. It was about 12 at night. No habitation could be seen for what we could see in the beautiful moon light. There was very little traffic this time at night and we were trying to reach early to catch up on lost sleep. As we neared a hillock, we saw a woman lit up in our headlights in the middle of the road, walking merrily.



Now I want to ask you what was the moral of the story.

Leader: Are we receding to mythology, my friend?

Young Scientists: Not, it was all very revealing to us when we recollected the event a couple of kilometers further passing through a village. We realised then that, that unescorted woman belonged to this village...

Merchant Banker: That because you had read the collected Works of Arthur Conan Doyle, I suppose?

Young Scientists: Humour apart, it was something unimaginable to a Delhi girl who found it hard to believe that a girl could walk alone on even a Delhi Street at 7.00 P.M., let alone on a deserted village road at midnight. 'Was it a Ghost?', she asked. Then we had further detailed discussions with a Govt. Official at Shillong the next day. He said it was nothing unusual for village women to move freely and unescorted. These tribals display a very aesthetic respect for womanhood. Rape is absolutely unheard of And way-laying is very unusual. The only danger they face is from outsiders.

Then we went and lived in a tribal village for a week, to learn more about this phenomenon. Large, spacious and beautiful mud houses with bamboo and thatch roof, for every family in the village. Every woman was an expert weaver as her costume showed. Most of them wore silk lungis which they themselves weave on loin looms. We saw them doing that even as they looked after the children in the house. They brewed their own liquor but there were no drunkards in the village. Even the women drank.

Bureaucrat: But I am afraid we are getting lost. Speak in headlines please.

Young Scientist: The essence is that they are a highly cultured people and if any change is desirable, it is that we try to tribalize ourselves than try to modernize them.

Bureaucrat: Are you really talking of taking to a bow and arrow?

Kuti: *"Trying to tribalize" is a metaphor an indicator, I suppose where we want our society to go. By a curious accident our society appears to have oberrated from a path of true progress and with our increased scientific knowledge compared to our tribal brethren, we should be able to appreciate the value of those values all the more.*

Economist: I am afraid we are sliding into mythology.

Young Scientist: What are items of real mythology lie in your basket, Sir! A surplus grain production when the poor starve. Milk trains running to Bombay while the village woman gets *Sukdi** for her child. Toothpaste manufacturers sending 70% dividend from a country that has used *Datoon*** for herbal tooth powders for thousands of years, oil cakes going out of the country to feed European cows and then importing Milk Powder from Europe, deep sea trawlers getting subsidized oil and competing with fishermen in shallow waters, paper mills getting Bamboo at 60 Paise per ton while the

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* *Sukdi* — a protein supplement

** *Datoon* — a twig for cleaning teeth

Bamboo artizan shells out Rs.15/- *per Bamboo*. ... I could go on at least for another half an hour, but I think the point is made.

Leader: But then what do you think we should do?

Young Scientists: I think the Kuti should know better.

Kuti: *I would only say this If you eliminate from your hearts and minds, all dead concepts in regards to the Mud House; its Economics, Ecology, Technology and look at the question from a truly objective point of view, we shall arrive at something similar is spirit to what I am seeing.*

TELL ME ABOUT THE WORD THAT SINGS WITHIN ME.

After writing 'Hind Swaraj' in 1908, Gandhi's very name had become anathema to developmentalists and Political Scientists as much as it was to the British imperialists. His avowed political Guru, Barrister Gokhale, while on a visit to South Africa in 1912, thought that 'Hind Swaraj' was so crude and hastily conceived that Gandhi himself would destroy the book after spending a year in India.

The very institutions for which the entire country was thanking the British rulers were attacked by Gandhi. Railways, doctors, lawyers, and schools, he thought, had inflicted disaster on the country.

It is nearly 80 years since he wrote the book

We too think that there are many new and more deadly versions of imperialism and torment, of pauperization and moronization, of hatred and violence around us and amidst us.

We knew clearly that they are there. We also faintly perceive what should instead be there. We would like this to reach and be enriched by the 'Susceptible Young', [illegible]

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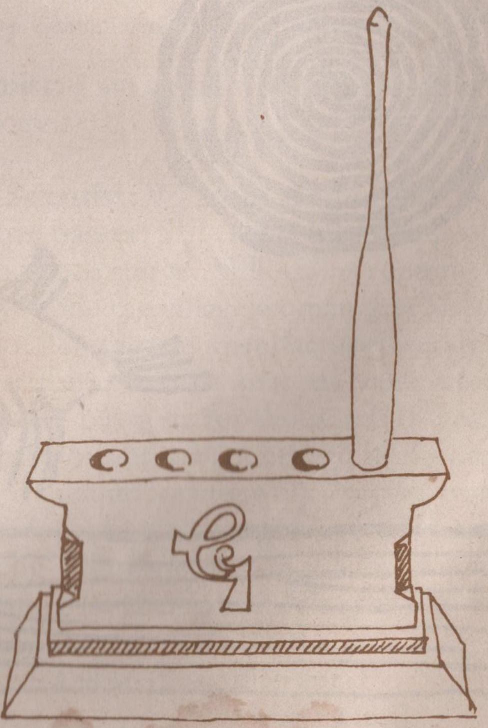
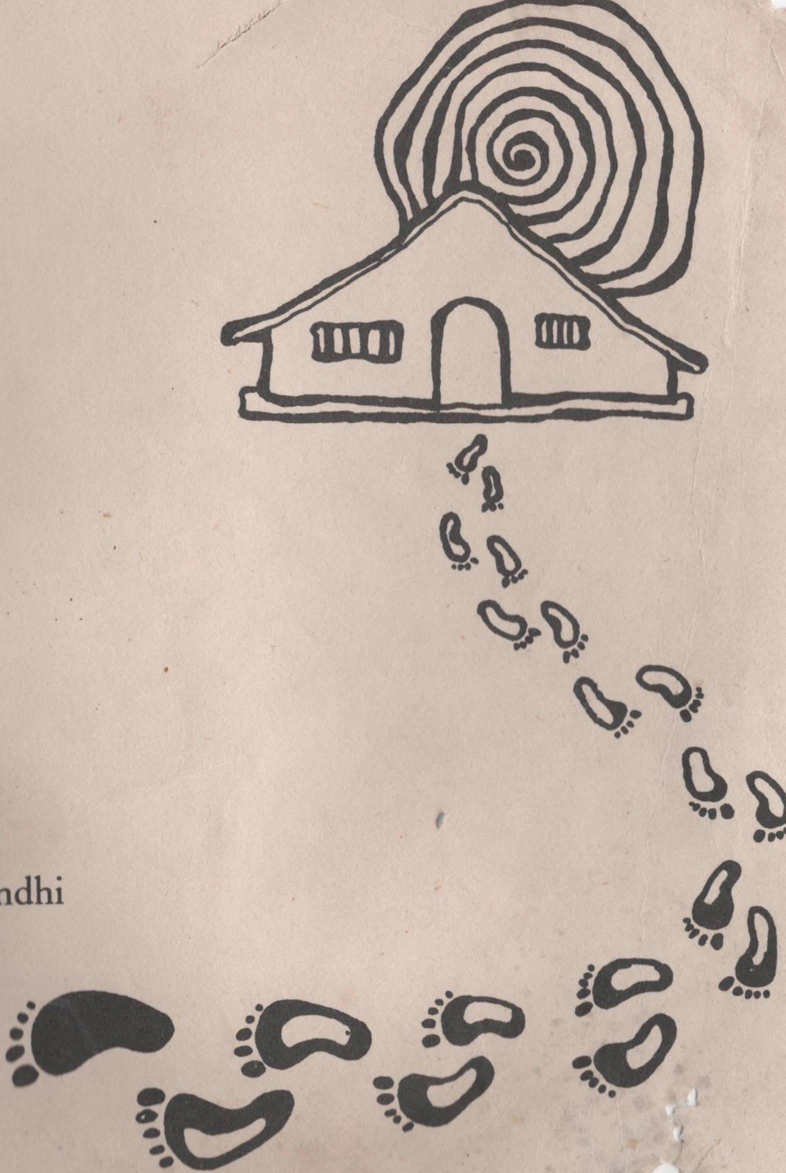
Academy of Young Scientists.



SEVEN SINS

Politics without Principles
Wealth without Work
Commerce without Morality
Education without Character
Pleasure without Conscience
Science without Humanity
Worship without Sacrifice

M. K. Gandhi



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A HUT
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[illegible]out:
The Business India Group of Publications.

Illust[illegible]
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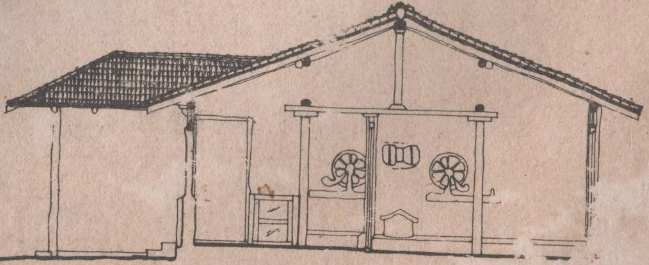
Printed [illegible]
37-B, [illegible] Nagpur 440 010.



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